

Contagion as Method

Generating stages of enunciation

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As elsewhere across the globe, categories of identification such as *migrant expat dyke black white sudaca exiled tourist third world resident citizen student neighbour indefinite-leave lesbian worker bollera refugee student* slot us into increasingly complex hierarchies of economic and cultural privilege. Neoliberal financial capitalism is characterized by proliferating *technologies of voice/technologies of silence* that operate through continual racial and sexual differentiation – silencing as they amplify, promoting as they hide, intensifying as they erase. In this context, we created Diásporas Críticas (a Barcelona-based arts research collective founded in 2014) to investigate and resist the structural racism of capitalism, as well as to move beyond the perpetual call to make an appearance in neoliberalism's market-oriented grammar of identification.

We take the question of how generosity relates to performance as an opportunity to consider the role of pedagogical and performance exercises in *generating* modifications to the realities and subjectivities into which they intervene. It is in this sense that we propose *generosity* in performance as that which *generates* – an approach that resists liberal modes of producing publics that forward 'the gift' as a packet of information, a message to be passed between autonomous subjects. There is the possibility that

at any moment the tradition of self-referential writing in artistic research will lure us into the trap of 'reflecting on' past projects. We want to try and resist a formula for writing about our work that sees the termination of the project as the condition of possibility for writing. Rather, we write to further a series of contagions between archivist and archive, script and speech, voice and voices, past, present and future.

CONTAGION AS METHOD

Between 2014 and 2016 the work of Diásporas Críticas¹ centred around the construction of *stages of enunciation* that operated through the appropriation of repeatable pedagogical codes. This 'code' was found in the point of departure for our work as a collective: the feminist manifesto text. The Diásporas Críticas workshop derives from a workshop by Paul B. Preciado that we received within the framework of the experimental academic course on 'Body Technologies' (part of the Programa de Estudios Independientes, Museu d'Art Contemporani Barcelona, 2013). After a period studying histories of the body, techniques of governance and systems of representation, the workshop proposed an immersive encounter with an archive of feminist and queer manifestos covering various moments in the history of micro-political resistance, constituting what Preciado calls 'somatic counter-fictions'. We received these texts without bibliographic information regarding place, date or authorship. The workshop revolved around selecting a text to read aloud with the aim of giving a body to these writings, now devoid of the marks of identification that often frame reading practices. The first task was to experiment in groups with finding 'what voice' the text asked for; what type of 'body did the reading demand' (Sarduy 1999); what performative gestures did it ask for? Subsequently we were asked to guess the origin of the text, the time and

¹ Between 2014 and 2016 the collective consisted of Anyely Marín Cisneros, Rebecca Close and Verónica Lahitte.

■ *A Day Without Time*, performance, Barcelona, 23 June 2015. Miriam Camara (from the workshop conducted with Espacio del Inmigrante) reading a manifesto made from fragments of texts by May Ayim and Gloria Anzaldúa.



place of writing; its 'subject of enunciation'; the political and ideological contexts into which each feminist manifesto intervened.

Months later we discovered the manifestos had worked on us. Our desire to produce stemmed from this encounter with the texts. Between 2014 and 2016 we conducted the workshop with collectives, associations, activists, artists and students in academic, arts and activist contexts across Barcelona, Madrid, Guayaquil, London, Mar de Plata, Buenos Aires, Gratz, San Sebastian and Bilbao. As we worked, the collection of texts expanded, becoming a corpus that included decolonial theory, border thinking, artist statements, film and video scripts and poetry. The manifesto – 'a little machine for producing desire' (Guattari 1972) – had produced modes of collective research and action in a process that operated as a kind of 'contagion'. While a key motivation came from the constant internal questions of the group concerning our means of intervening in our neighbourhoods as neighbours, feminists, artists, foreigners and migrants, the basis of our work together was the workshop itself: the workshop had *generated* us as a collective, and not the other way around.

The workshop methodology consistently overflowed the borders of a conventional reading group, mainly because the session's 'code' (its set of instructions, its pattern and *gene*) were not designed to create a space for 'discussion' or 'reflection'. The workshop was not conceived as a space for discursive exchange, much less textual interpretation: participants would receive a set of fragments of texts and become implicated in various dynamics that accelerated – even imposed – a rhythm of moments of selecting and reading texts aloud that avoided discursive emptiness or hermeneutical games. We deliberately avoided giving time to what we called 'the idle talk' of the text and, in each edition or repetition, we varied the dynamics, always seeking to create the conditions for participants to lend themselves to exercises in voice and yield the body openly to collectivized practices of reading and listening. The generosity came from the participants as we stepped back from our positions as researchers and moved towards the procedures of accompaniment, logistics, technical support and even disappearance.



■ *How to Write a Tropical Disease/How to Write a Manifesto*, Performance, Guayaquil, 9 September 2016. Maria Auxiliadora Balladares and Francisco Santanna reading a text of various fragments of manifestos and archival documents.

TECHNOLOGIES OF VOICE

If we were inviting spectator-listeners and participant-readers to experiment with processes of reconfiguring subjectivity, it was because we ourselves were traversing an intense process of transformation through the manifesto-contagion. The first manifestos – for example Olympe de Gouges' 1791 *Declaration of the Rights of Women*, Toussaint L'Ouverture's 1797 *Letter to the French Directory* or Sojourner Truth's *Ain't I a Woman* speech to the Akron Ohio Women's Convention in 1851 – emerge as the industrial model surpasses the plantation economy in capitalist production. Benedict Anderson links the invention of the neocolonial nation-state to the intensification of literacy practices in as far as they created homogenous national narratives and linguistic identities. The printing press and print capitalism, as Anderson describes, 'created languages-of-power' (2006: 45), not only favouring certain demographics and dialects but also phonetic sounds, causing others to disappear (Bergvall 2011). While there may be 'proto-manifestos' from before the late eighteenth century, the manifesto form is tied to the colonial industrialization of writing. Acknowledging the colonality of the manifesto pushes us to consider how spatial realities and the materiality of the voice are fields of *technological intervention*.

Following Donna Haraway's (1997) analysis of how social, material and literary technologies interweave to constitute the public/private sphere, and Teresa De Lauretis' (1987) consideration of fields of knowledge that operate as oppressive 'technologies of gender', we propose *technologies of voice/technologies of silence* as a useful term for considering how legislation,

science and medical practices, media narratives, industry and institutions have historically generated the materiality of the voice – its volume, quality, vibration, resonance and power.

Through the generous contributions of each reader to co-constructing the stage of enunciation, the workshop produced an assemblage of pedagogical and political motivations and tactics. We began to play with the paradoxes and borders that are either upheld or dismantled when reading becomes enunciating; listening becomes pedagogy; voices become assemblage. We began to see the pedagogical exercise as *aesthetic experimentation*, and the reading aloud of texts as a work of *collective performance* and a transformative *technology of voice*.

GENERATING STAGES OF ENUNCIATION

Our practice of performance-reading developed as an extension of the workshop. *La ladrona de datos* (*The Data Thief*, 2014, Buenos Aires and Barcelona), *Radio Free Europe* (2015, Rennes), *Un día sin tiempo* (*A Day Without Time*, 2015, Barcelona) and *Como escribir una enfermedad tropical/Como escribir un manifiesto* (*How to Write a Tropical Disease/How to Write a Manifesto*, 2016, Guayaquil) operated through invitations to artists, teachers, feminists, poets and migrant activists to construct a score of voices enunciating poetic-political texts in the context of the street, conference or arts space. Situated between the feminist and anti-racist activist action, the poetry reading, the pedagogical exercise and performance, the collective construction of a stage of enunciation demanded an active interrogation on the part of the spectator-listeners. The politicized groups

that engaged in these processes as participants or audience members either expressed suspicion towards the aesthetic framing of the exercise or embraced the opportunity to experiment with an alternative strategy; the curators and artists either hesitated at the centrality of the political manifesto or appreciated the option to politicize arts intervention techniques. By colliding distinct artistic and political codes, the performances interrupted the codified rituals of reception and listening.

The contaminations that occurred through voice exercises, the shared pedagogical experience of collective reading and the complicity created between participants (many of these alliances have been sustained over time) were possible because these were ways of working encoded in the manifesto: a text that by nature invites voices to lend themselves in an act of generosity. It was the generous force of the set of manifestos and the reader-enunciators who activated them that agitated the boundaries between pedagogical exercise and performance, workshop and action. Over the two initial years of *Diásporas Críticas*, characterized by the work with manifestos, we invited many allies. Most of them were women artists, migrant activists, pro-sex, anti-psychiatry, anti-racist artists, curators, teachers, students, poets and friends: a dispersed gathering of accomplices imprinted in the memory of the neighbourhood and city as a generous network.

It seemed then and now, too, that *generating* through manifesto-contagion is always achieved through the simplest gestures – reading, lending your voice and listening.

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